NEWS RELEASE

Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program
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NORTHERN PIKE, SMALLMOUTH BASS AND CHANNEL CATFISH FOCUS OF RESEARCH IN COLORADO AND UTAH

LAKEWOOD, Colo. – The Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program will focus on northern pike, smallmouth bass and channel catfish in an experimental nonnative fish management project this spring and summer to determine if populations of these species in certain river reaches in Colorado and Utah can be reduced to a level that will enable endangered and other native fishes to coexist and thrive.

The public is invited to attend information meetings: April 28 -- City Hall Auditorium, 250 N. 5th St., Grand Junction; April 29 -- Courthouse Annex, 136 6th St., Steamboat Springs; and April 30 -- Shadow Mountain Clubhouse, 1055 County Road 7, Craig. All meetings begin at 6:30 p.m.

Biologists believe these nonnative fish species pose a significant threat to the endangered humpback chub, bonytail, Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker.

"Our data suggest the abundant gamefish like northern pike, smallmouth bass, and channel catfish are eating most of the young fish produced each year," said Colorado Division of Wildlife Native Fish Conservation Program Manager Tom Nesler. "This will result in declining adult populations of native fish species over time. We think the reduction of large predators like northern pike from the river may improve survival and abundance of Colorado pikeminnow, in part by reducing competition for food." Other native fishes expected to benefit from this experiment are roundtail chub, bluehead and flannelmouth sucker and speckled dace.

Three Recovery Program partners – the states of Colorado and Utah and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) – will conduct the work in 438 miles of river in the Upper Colorado River Basin in Colorado and Utah. Biologists from Colorado State University (CSU) will also participate.

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In Colorado, biologists will establish experimental treatment and control sections in the Yampa River between Hayden and the Green River confluence, on the White River between Rangely and the Utah state line and on the Colorado River between the confluence with the Gunnison River near Grand Junction and the Colorado-Utah state line.

In treatment sections, targeted nonnative fish species will be removed and efforts will be made wherever practical to relocate these fish to local ponds and reservoirs that are publicly accessible to anglers. In control sections, targeted nonnative fish species will be captured, marked or tagged and returned to the river.

Similar efforts will take place on the Green and Duchesne rivers in northeast Utah.

Follow-up sampling will determine if management efforts reduced the numbers of targeted nonnative fishes in sections where they were removed. Monitoring of endangered and other native fishes will determine if numbers of these species increase.

"This research will help identify the level of management required to minimize the threat of nonnative fishes to the endangered fishes to satisfy criteria needed to recover these species," said Recovery Program Director Robert Muth. "We will assess the data each year to determine future nonnative fish management actions."

Nonnative fish management is only one of several actions the Recovery Program is implementing to meet its dual goals of recovering the endangered fishes. Efforts are also ongoing to provide river flows, restore habitat, construct fish ladders and screens, produce and stock endangered fish and monitor results.

Established in 1988, the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program is a voluntary, cooperative program involving state and federal agencies, environmental groups and water and power user organizations in Colorado, Utah and Wyoming. Its purpose is to recover the endangered fishes while water development proceeds in accordance with federal and state laws and interstate compacts. For more information, visit the Recovery Program's website: coloradoriverrecovery.fws.gov or call 303-969-7322, ext. 227.

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